

UN reports surging food prices fuel 40 percent jump in global hunger



A woman cooks food at a camp for internally displaced people in Syria, where cooking oil prices have soared 440 percent versus a year ago, according to the UN [File: Mahmoud Hassano/Reuters]

United Nations, July 8 (RHC)-- Acute food insecurity has soared 40 percent this year as recent food price hikes have exacerbated existing pressures from conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations World Food Program (WFP) said.

Defined as any lack of food that threatens lives, livelihoods or both, acute food insecurity is affecting, or is at high risk of affecting, a record 270 million people this year, the UN agency said.

“High food prices are hunger’s new best friend,” said WFP Chief Economist Arif Husain. “We already have conflict, climate and COVID-19 working together. Now food prices have joined the deadly trio,” he added.

The WFP said average wheat flour prices in Lebanon have risen 219 percent year-on-year amid accelerating economic turmoil, while cooking oil prices have soared 440 percent versus a year ago in war-devastated Syria.

On internationally traded markets, world food prices were up 33.9 percent year-on-year in June, according to the UN food agency’s price index, which measures a basket of cereals, oilseeds, dairy products, meat and sugar.

However, they did fall in June versus May, the first such decrease in 12 months. After declining for several decades, world hunger has been on the rise since 2016.

The WFP, which was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year, says about 690 million people or 9 percent of the world’s population go to bed hungry each night. It is aiming to assist 139 million people this year, the biggest operation in its history.

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